



KDG GUIDE

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TOP 5 WAYS TO GROW THE KINGDOM BY DESIGNING WELL

By designing your building well, you are priming the heavenly net for the Lord's catch. Learn about creating an intimacy gradient in your ministry building, placing common areas, enhancing waiting spaces, and more...

A KDG guide adapted from "*A Pattern Language*"
by Christopher Alexander and edited specifically to
address the goals of the modern ministry in fulfilling
their commission.

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A 3D architectural rendering of a church foyer. The space is multi-level with a mezzanine level featuring a dark wooden railing. The walls are a mix of stone and wood paneling. A large, abstract sculpture made of branches hangs from the ceiling. In the foreground, a man and a woman are walking towards the right. In the background, a sign reads "CHILDREN'S CHECK-IN" and several other people are visible, including a man standing near a stone fireplace on the right. The overall atmosphere is modern and warm.

Introduction

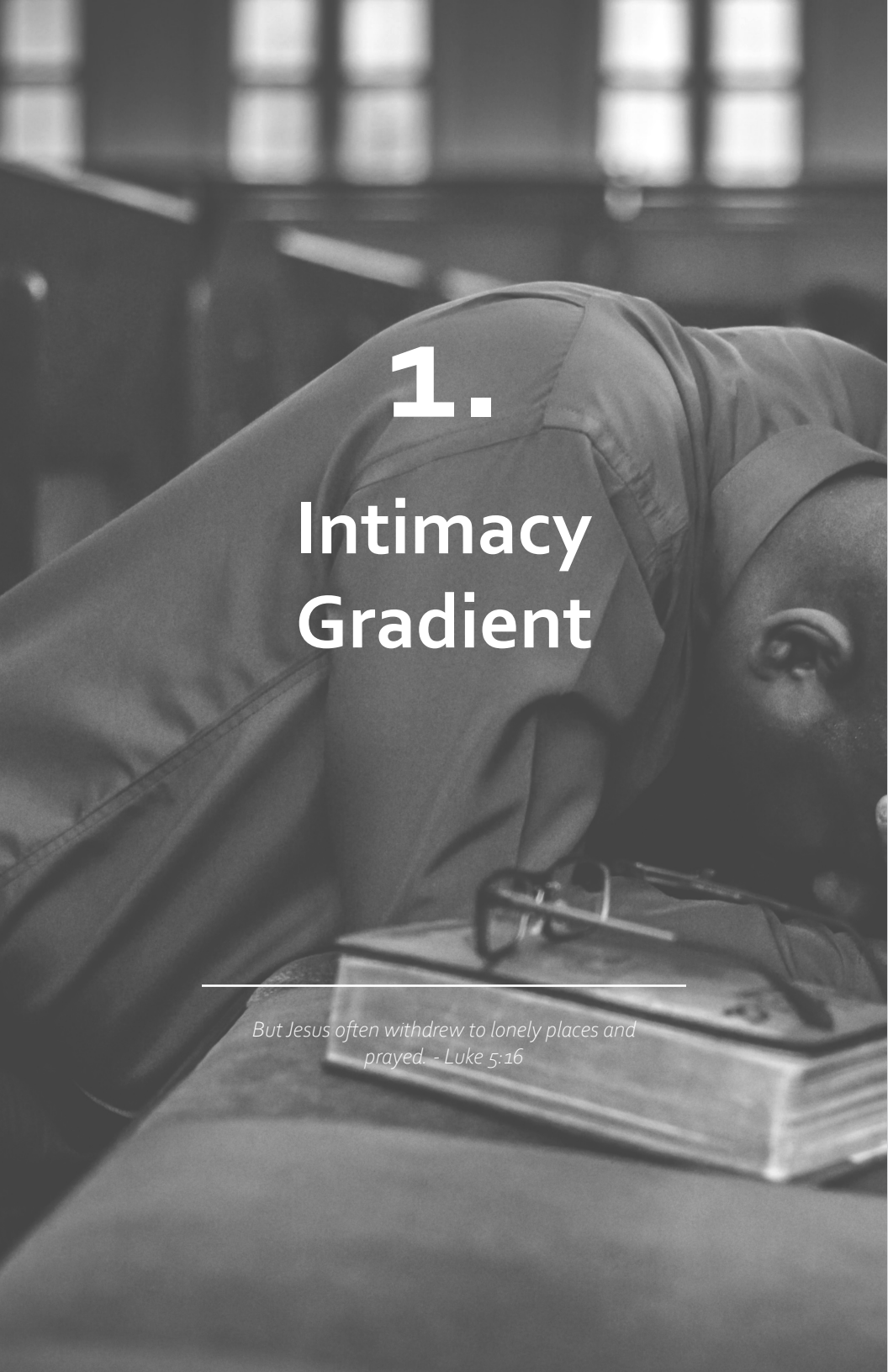
*Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom
the LORD has put skill and intelligence to know
how to do any work in the construction of the
sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the
LORD has commanded. - Exodus 36:1*

A well-designed building fulfills its intended purpose effectively, considers the needs of its users and provides spaces that support their activities and requirements. How much more then should a ministry or church building fulfill the requirements of a well-designed building, so that God's purpose may be served to the fullest?

Christopher Alexander is an architect and theorist known for his influential work "A Pattern Language". Published in 1977, it is a comprehensive book that presents a set of 253 patterns or design principles to guide good design especially as it pertains to the human being's social, emotional, psychological and physiological needs.

In this condensed guide, we took 5 of these time-tested patterns* and applied them to ministry and church projects to help you better understand how good design can serve the needs of both the leaders and the body, and foster ministry growth.

* Christopher Alexander, *A Pattern Language* (Oxford University Press, 1977.) Patterns used: 127 Intimacy Gradient, 129 Common Areas at the Heart, 133 Staircase as a Stage, 137 Children's Realm, 150 A Place to Wait, 203 Child Caves.



1. Intimacy Gradient

*But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and
prayed. - Luke 5:16*

Traditionally, almost every culture around the world have designed their spaces with a gradient of settings with different degrees of intimacy, so that the inhabitants or visitors can choose the right spot for an encounter. This gives each encounter a dimension of added meaning.

In a church or ministry building, people need an intimacy gradient in order to feel that they are at the right place for an arranged or chance meeting with the pastor, with another member of the body, or with God Himself. The pastor's or counselor's office is the most intimate space a visitor can go to, the sanctuary less so, and the entrance room most public of all.

When designing such a building, we lay these spaces out accordingly so that they create a sequence which begins with the most public spaces, and then leads into the slightly more private areas, and finally to the most private rooms. This sequence when done properly would create a comfort level for the visitor to stay as long as they like in the more public spaces. To achieve this, design the entrance and coffee area to be warm and inviting, and station volunteers to greet newcomers in a friendly way. Place connect cards at easily accessible areas. To learn more about common areas and how to design them, turn over to the next section.



2.

Common Areas at the Heart

*The Son of Man has come eating and drinking. -
Luke 7:34*

No social group, including churches and ministries, can survive without constant informal contact among its members. A church building supports this kind of contact by providing common areas.

The form and location of common areas is critical. For example, if a common area is at the end of a corridor and people have to make a special, deliberate effort to go there, they are not likely to use it informally and spontaneously. Alternatively, if the circulation path cuts too deeply into the common area, the space will be too exposed and it will be uncomfortable to linger there and settle down.

The balanced solution is one where a common path runs tangent to the common areas and is open to them in passing. People will be constantly passing the space, but because the path is to one side, they are not forced to stop and can keep going. If they want to, they can stop for a moment and see what's happening, or they can come right in and settle down.

Your church's common area must be at the center of gravity of the building, equally accessible to everyone and felt as the center of informal connections. It must be "on the way" from the entrance to the more private areas, so people always go by it on the way in and out of the building. It must have the right components in it - usually a coffee or eating space, since eating is one of the most communal of activities, and a sitting space - at least some comfortable chairs so that people will feel like staying.



3. Staircase as a Stage

*Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language.
- Acts 21:40*

A staircase is not just a way of getting from one floor to another. The stair is itself a space, a volume, a part of the ministry building, and unless this space is made to live, it will be a dead spot and work to disconnect the building. Changes in level play a crucial role at many moments: they provide special places for people to sit before or after a service, a place where guest speakers can make a special entrance, a place where the pastor can give an informal speech, a place from which to look at other people while also being seen, a place which increases face to face contact when many people are gathered together on a Sunday or a midweek service.

The stair should then always be made rather open to the space below it, embracing the room, coming down around the perimeter of the room to form a socially connected space. The first four or five steps are places where people are most likely to sit - to support this, make the bottom of the staircase flare out, widen the steps, and make them comfortable to sit on.

We suggest that the stair be central in your ministry building, placed in the common area but not too near the front entrance so that its social character will not be disrupted by the very public function of the entrance. Let it be clear and visible to everyone who comes in.



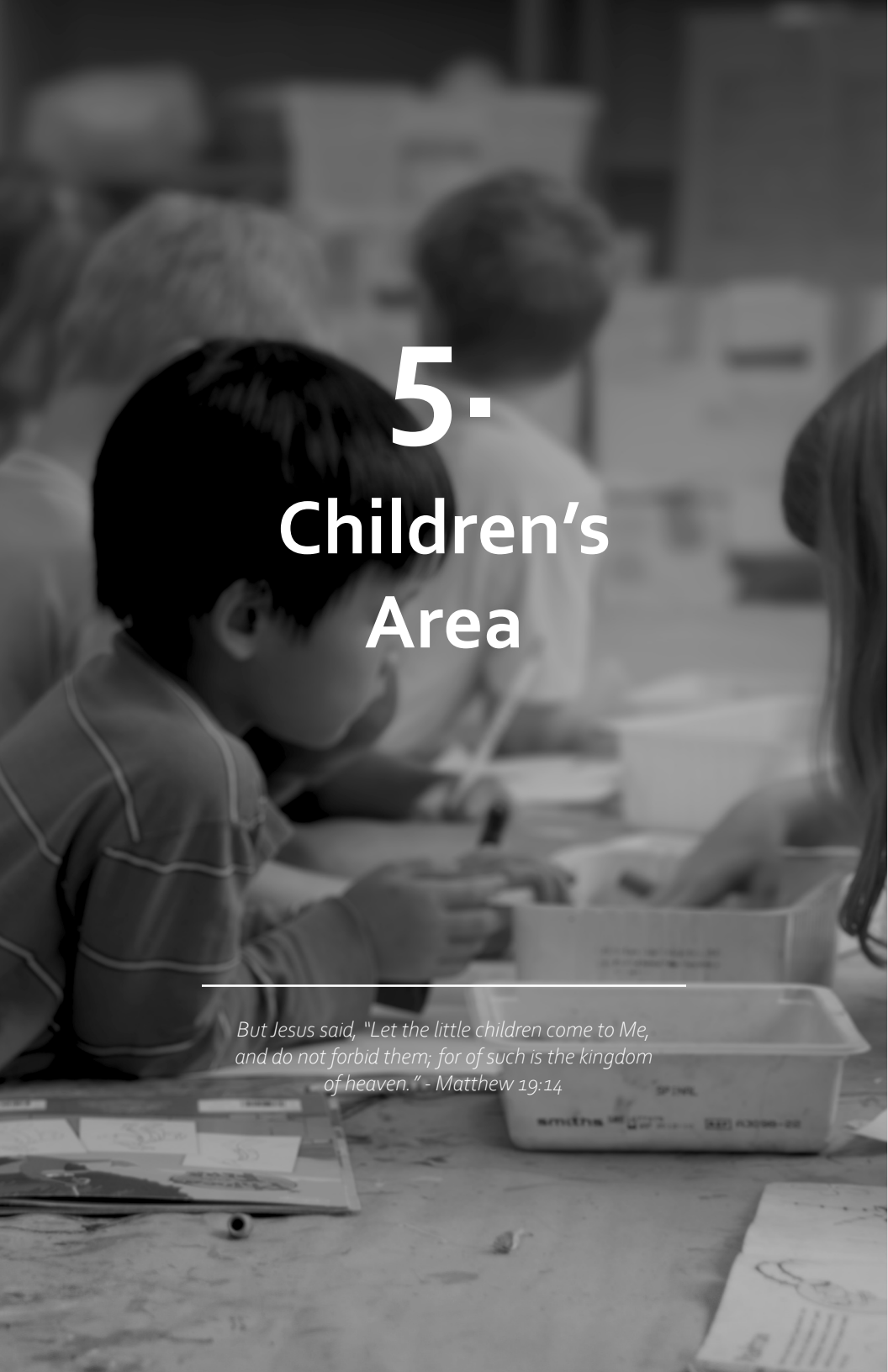
4. Positive Waiting Spaces

Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD! -Psalms 27:14

Whatever people are waiting for - the service to start, the pastor to meet with them one-on-one, the coffee to be made, the small group leader to arrive - has built in uncertainties, especially for the newcomer. Time seems to pass more slowly when we are bored or anxious or restless. Studies have shown that people found waiting in welfare agencies consistently thought they had been waiting for longer than they really had - some thought they had been waiting four times as long.

How can people who are waiting spend their time wholeheartedly and as fully as when the activity starts? It can be done best when the waiting time is fused with some other activity that draws in other people who are not there essentially to wait. It could be coffee, food, games - or, shelves full of Bibles and spiritual guidebooks that are free for anyone to read or borrow. Waiting time can also be meditative time, and a window seat that looks down upon a street scene below, for instance, could be a place where someone sits and think upon the Lord while they wait.

Waiting time is not wasted time because God is always working behind the scenes. We can design the space to be conducive for people to commune with Him in their thoughts or in their interactions with fellow believers as they wait.



5. Children's Area

*But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me,
and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom
of heaven." - Matthew 19:14*

Children are a big part of the Kingdom, and the child's world is not some single space or room - it is a continuum of spaces that is swallowed up into the child's world as part of their circulation path when they enter the church. Therefore, consider if the common area can have activities or corners for kids to linger. The children's play area can enjoin the common area to one side, so that parents can look at their kids while waiting for the service to begin. However, it must be possible to close it off because the children's space wants to be exclusive at times.

Children's areas in churches and ministries are often overlooked, under-designed or stuck into random non-descript rooms, and filled with kid-sized tables and chairs that look like they don't belong there. If you are building a new building from scratch or planning an interior renovation, consider the opportunity to design intentionally for the children. Children love to be in tiny, cave-like places - under old crates, tables, tents, etc. In your children's area, there could be opportunities to make special, small places within thick walls or under loft storage where kids and their friends can play. Most of the world about them is "adult space" and they love to carve out a place that is kid size.

Part of growing a ministry is including young families and their children. Instead of making them feel like they are merely being "accommodated," good design intentionally shows them that their presence is cherished and enjoyed.

A 3D architectural rendering of a dining space. The room features a wooden floor with a geometric pattern, several round tables with stools, and a long wooden table with chairs. Large windows in the background offer a view of a landscape. People are depicted sitting at the tables, engaged in conversation. The overall atmosphere is modern and inviting.

Conclusion

Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work. -Exodus 36:2

Good design enhances the experience of those using the building and contributes positively to the connections between members of the body. It promotes social interaction, contributes to a sense of place and identity within the ministry, and fosters a sense of belonging. Visitors discern the intention of the spaces as they enter for the first time, and are likely to feel that they are at the right place to have meaningful encounters with fellow believers and with God.

There are many more ways to tailor-fit good design principles to your project. At KDG, we are Christians and professional architects who have worked with world-changing ministries to design spaces that fulfill their unique visions. We will take the time to know you and your heart, and work with you to conceptualize and effect your commission from God. Get in touch with us today!

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